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USAID/CAR Bi-weekly Report

Regional

Community Connections Program Completes First Visitor Exchanges

March 31, 2006, marked the return of the first two Community Connections visitor exchange groups from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The first group consisted of ten Turkmen representatives from NGOs, ecological clubs, women's clubs, and other community organizations. Their 21-day program was focused on strengthening the capacity of local activists. Participants attended meetings and workshops in Chicago, Illinois to learn how U.S. NGOs and government officials collaborate to develop grassroots programs. Upon their return to Turkmenistan, the participants began work planning joint programs, mobilizing community resources, and seeking fundraising opportunities.



Participants met with the Director of the Office of Economic Status of Women in Minneapolis.

Photo: ACCELS

The second group of ten anti-trafficking professionals from Uzbekistan visited Minneapolis, Minnesota where they met with state senators, law enforcement bodies, universities, and NGOs involved in anti-trafficking issues. As a result of their visit, the group decided to develop a project to strengthen the interactions of state bodies with nongovernmental-noncommercial organizations to prevent the trafficking in persons in Uzbekistan. The Community Connections Program, implemented by World Learning, offers home stay-based, three to five-week practical training opportunities in the United States for business and professional organization leaders from all five Central Asian Republics. The next scheduled exchanges are for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the areas of NGO development, the role of associations, and healthy lifestyle education.

Kazakhstan

National Conference Presents Sentinel Surveillance Results and Explores Trends

In early April, the Kazakhstan Republican AIDS Center held the Third National HIV Sentinel Surveillance Conference in Almaty. The conference marked the completion of the third year of sentinel surveillance for HIV infection in four USAID-supported pilot sites. The results will help the Government of Kazakhstan to identify and focus on vulnerable groups and activities needed to improve HIV prevention. Data revealed that the number of HIV infected rose by 15% in 2005, the main mode of transmission remains injecting drug use, and migrants are becoming another important risk group for HIV transmission.



Country's epidemiologists were presented the HIV/AIDS trends in the four pilots over the past three years.

Photo: CDC

USAID's Infectious Disease Control Program, implemented in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), provided training, equipment, and technical assistance to introduce HIV surveillance in Kazakhstan. Since 2003, the program has been



working in the four pilot oblasts of Pavlodar, Karaganda, Shymkent, and Uralsk, which include both sites of HIV outbreaks and others that are more typical of the country. In 2005, the Government of Kazakhstan decided to expand the sentinel surveillance model developed by CDC to cover 21 cities. This year, the Ministry of Health is planning to centrally procure test-kits for all of the 21 AIDS centers that carry out such monitoring. CDC leveraged \$15,000 from Kazakhstan's grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria to support this initiative.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan Adopts National Appraisal Standards

A set of six national appraisal standards, developed with support from the USAID Land Reform Project, were approved by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Kulov in April 2006. The standards will require all of the country's appraisers, both private and state-employed, to apply internationally-accepted principles in appraising real estate and other assets. This is a significant achievement for Kyrgyzstan; until now, governmental agencies had different standards for appraising state-owned assets for privatization and other purposes, and there were no agreed standards among private practitioners. The new uniform standards define general concepts, principles, professional ethics, and reporting requirements of appraisal and detail the requirements for the appraisal of real estate, equipment, machinery, and businesses. This will increase the transparency of the appraisals and help eliminate corruption among governmental agencies.

The newly adopted national appraisal standards are a result of nearly three years of efforts by the USAID Land Reform Project, implemented by Chemonics. The project brought experts to assist in drafting the standards, advocate for their adoption, and train appraisers in their application. The project will continue to work with appraisers in Kyrgyzstan to ensure proper use and application of these rules.

Tajikistan

Environmental Protection Project Brings Communities Together

Recently, USAID's Peaceful Community Initiative, implemented by Mercy Corps, completed a project to plant 4,400 new trees in public spaces in Hurmi and Sughd Oblasts, regions, torn by years of conflict over thinning orchards. The orchards were decimated in the years following Tajikistan's independence, as residents cut down fruit and other valuable trees to heat their homes and cook. This practice has remained a source of conflict between residents of neighboring villages and between communities and government bodies, most notably the Ecology and Forestry Departments. Furthermore, the lack of trees in a jamoat (cluster of villages) contributes to the increasingly destructive landslides in the area, destroying arable land and damaging homes.



*Community members donated the trees and participated in their planting.
Photo: Peaceful Community Initiative*

Over 3,000 of the newly planted trees were provided by Hurmi Jamoat and community members. The trees were planted in a community event, known as "hasher" in Tajik, along roads and in orchards to protect the land from erosion and to provide a source of income for the residents. A second hasher, planned by the USAID project, will clean garbage and debris in the area. Government officials and other specialists will follow-up with seminars and brochures on environmental preservation, the adverse effects of over-grazing and cutting down trees, and will establish a joint community-government commission to oversee environmental protection in the jamoat.



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Turkmenistan

USAID Enables Farmers Reclaim 300 Hectares of Land

A group of Turkmen farmers, supported by the USAID Water Users' Association Assistance Program (WUAAP), celebrated the rehabilitation of an irrigation and drainage canal system in Bayramali, Mary Velayat (region) in March 2006. The rehabilitated system will irrigate about 300 hectares of the community's land, thus contributing to increased harvests and incomes. WUAAP, implemented by Counterpart International, provided extensive assistance to the farmers, including legal support in registering the group as a farmers organization; technical consultations; and training in business development, management of water resources, and democratic governance. The farmers worked to identify priority needs of the community, cooperated with the local government to design a rehabilitation project, and mobilized resources. WUAAP supported the initiative with a grant and technical assistance.



On March 23 Bayramali farmers marked the rehabilitation of 5.6 kilometers of irrigation and drainage canals.

Photo: WUAAP

This is the first rehabilitation initiative completed by a farmers group under WUAAP in Turkmenistan. Its success in mobilizing community resources while cooperating with local authorities and other stakeholders has already generated some interest from neighboring farmers to learn and apply the group's experience to their own challenges. WUAAP is currently working with three more farmers groups to increase their agricultural productivity and benefits in the country's largest agricultural region, Mary Velayat.

Uzbekistan

Training on International Religious Freedom Standards Held in Uzbekistan

From March 13-18, USAID's Legal Education Project, implemented by ABA/CEELI, organized a series of trainings for defense lawyers and human rights activists on international religious freedom standards and their application in domestic and international courts. Approximately 80 participants from across Uzbekistan were provided with a broad perspective on religious freedom issues, as laid out in international law, with particular emphasis on UN documents to which Uzbekistan is a signatory. While several lawyers had prior experience dealing with religious freedom cases, usually extremism cases, this training provided them with a firmer theoretical background on a variety of issues, such as acceptable and unacceptable government limitations on religious practice, registration of religious communities, religious education, and proselytism. The trainings were delivered by an internationally renowned expert on religious freedom issues and a member of OSCE/ODIHR's Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Professor W. Cole Durham, Jr. from Brigham Young University. The seminars provided Uzbek lawyers and human rights activists tools for defending clients whose religious rights may have been violated.



Prof. W. Cole Durham, Jr. from Brigham Young University conducts training on Religious Freedom Standards.

Photo: ABA/CEELI